

The Massacre of the Innocents !

Address by the Rev. C. Kingsley.

"AFTER the admirable speech and *resume* of the whole intent of this meeting that you have just heard from the Chairman, there seems at first sight very little to be said. [But let me say one thing to the ladies who are interested in this matter. Have they really seriously considered what they are about to do in carrying out their own plans? Are they aware that if their society really succeeds they will produce a very serious, some would think a very dangerous, change in the state of this nation? Are they aware that they would probably save the lives of some thirty or forty per cent. of the children who are born in England, and that therefore they

would cause the subjects of Queen Victoria to increase at a very far more rapid rate than they do now? And are they aware that some very wise men inform us that England is already over-peopled, and that it is an exceedingly puzzling question where we shall soon be able to find work or food for our masses, so rapidly do they increase already, in spite of the thirty or forty per cent. kind Nature carries off yearly before they are five years old? Have they considered what they are to do with all those children whom they are going to save alive? That has to be thought of; and if they really do believe, with political economists now, that over-population is a possibility to a country which has the greatest colonial empire that the world has ever seen, then I think they had better stop in their course and let the children die, as they have been dying.

“ But if, on the other hand, it seems to them, as I confess it does to me, that the most precious thing in the world is a human being : that the lowest, and poorest, and most degraded of human beings is better than all the dumb animals in the world ; that there is an infinite, priceless capability in that creature, degraded as it may be—a capability of virtue, and of social and industrial use, which, if

it is taken in time, may be developed up to a pitch, of which at first sight the child gives no hint whatsoever: if they believe again, that of all races upon earth now, probably the English race is the finest, and that it gives not the slightest sign whatever of exhaustion; that it seems to be on the whole a young race, and to have very great capabilities in it which have not yet been developed, and above all, the most marvellous capability of adapting itself to every sort of climate, and every form of life that any nation, except the old Roman, ever had in the world: if they consider with me that it is worth the while of political economists and social philosophers to look at the map, and see that about four-fifths of the globe cannot be said as yet to be in anywise inhabited or cultivated, or in the state in which men could make it by any fair supply of population and industry and human intellect:—then, perhaps, they may think with me that it is a duty, one of the noblest of duties, to help the increase of the English race as much as possible, and to see that every child that is born into this great nation of England be developed to the highest pitch to which we can develop him, in physical strength and in beauty, as well as in intellect and in virtue. And then, in

that light, it does seem to me, that this Association—small now, but I do hope some day to become great, and to become the mother Association of many and valuable children—is one of the noblest, most right-minded, straightforward, and practical conceptions that I have come across for some years.

“ We all know the difficulties of Sanitary Legislation. One looks at them at times almost with despair. I have my own reasons, with which I will not trouble this meeting, for looking on them with more despair than ever ; not on account of the government of the time, or any possible government that could come to England, but on account of the peculiar class of persons in whom the ownership of the small houses has become more and more vested, and who are becoming more and more, I had almost said, the arbiters of the popular opinion, and of every election of parliament. However, that is no business of mine here ; that must be settled somewhere else : and a fearfully long time, it seems to me, it will be before it is settled. But, in the mean time, what legislation cannot do, I believe private help, and, above all, woman’s help, can do even better. It can do this ; it can not only improve the condition of the working man ; I am not speaking of working :

men just at this time, I am speaking of the middle classes, of the man who owns the house in which the working-man lives. I am speaking, too, of the wealthy tradesman ; I am speaking, it is a sad thing to have to say, of our own class as well as of others. Sanitary Reform, as it is called, or, in plain English, the art of health, is so very recent a discovery, as all true physical science is, that we ourselves and our own class know very little about it, and practise it very ill. And this Society, I do hope, will bear in mind that it is not simply to affect the working-man, not only to go into the foul alley ; but it is to go to the door of the farmer, to the door of the shopkeeper, aye, to the door of ladies and gentlemen of the same rank as ourselves. Women can do in that work what men cannot do. Private correspondence, private conversation, private example, may do what no legislation can do. I am struck more and more with the amount of disease and death I see around me in all classes, which no sanitary legislation whatsoever could touch, unless you had a complete house-to-house visitation of a government officer, with powers to enter every house, to drain and ventilate it, and not only that, but to regulate the clothes and the diet of every inhabitant, and that

among all ranks. I can conceive of nothing short of that, which would be absurd and impossible and most harmful, which would stop the present amount of disease and death which I see around me, without some such private exertion on the part of women, above all of mothers, as I do hope will spring from this Institution more and more.

“I see this, that three persons out of four are utterly unaware of the general causes of their own ill health, and of the ill health of their children. They talk of their ‘afflictions,’ and their ‘misfortunes;’ and, if they be pious people, they talk of ‘the will of God,’ and of ‘the visitation of God.’ I do not like to trench upon those matters, but when I read in my Book and in your Book that ‘it is not the will of our Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish,’ it has come to my mind sometimes with very great strength that that may have a physical application as well as a spiritual one, and that the Father in heaven who does not wish the child’s soul to die may possibly have created that child’s body for the purpose of its not dying except in a good old age. Not only in the lower class, but in the middle class, when one sees an unhealthy family, then in three cases out of four, if one takes time, trouble, and care-

enough, one can, with the help of the doctor who has been attending them, run the evil home to a very different cause than the will of God ; and that is, to a stupid neglect, a stupid ignorance, or what is just as bad, a stupid indulgence.

“ Now, I do believe that if those tracts which you are publishing, which I have read, and of which I cannot speak too highly, are spread over the length and breadth of the land, and if women, clergymen’s wives, the wives of manufacturers and of great employers, district visitors and school mistresses, have these books put into their hands, and are persuaded to spread them, and to enforce them, by their own example and by their own counsel, then in the course of a few years, this system being thoroughly carried out, you would see a sensible and large increase in the rate of population. When you have saved your children alive, then you must settle what to do with them. But a living dog is better than a dead lion ; I would rather have the living child, and let it take its chance, than let it return to God—wasted. Oh ! it is a distressing thing to see children die. God gives the most beautiful and precious thing that earth can have, and we just take it and cast it away ; we cast our pearls upon the dunghill, and

leave them. A dying child is to me one of the most dreadful sights in the world. A dying man, a man dying on the field of battle, that is a small sight: he has taken his chance; he has had his excitement, he has had his glory, if that will be any consolation to him; if he is a wise man, he has the feeling that he is doing his duty by his country, or by his king, or by his queen. I am not horrified or shocked at the sight of the man who dies on the field of battle: let him die so. It does not horrify or shock me to see a man dying in a good old age, even though it be painful at the last, as it too often is. But it does shock me, it does make me feel that the world is indeed out of joint, to see a child die. I believe it to be a priceless boon to the child to have lived for a week, or a day; but oh, what has God given to this thankless earth, and what has the earth thrown away, in nine cases out of ten, from its own neglect and carelessness! What that boy might have been, what he might have done as an Englishman, if he could have lived and grown up healthy and strong! And I entreat you to bear this in mind, that it is not as if our lower classes or our middle classes were not worth saving; bear in mind that the physical beauty and strength

and intellectual power of the middle classes,—the shopkeeping class, the farming class, the working class—whenever you give them a fair chance, whenever you give them fair food and air, and physical education of any kind, prove them to be the finest race in Europe. Not merely the aristocracy, splendid race as they are: but down and down and down to the lowest labouring man, to the navigator;—why there is not such a body of men in Europe as our navigators, and no body of men perhaps have had a worse chance of growing to be what they are; and yet see what they have done. See the magnificent men they become in spite of all that is against them, all that is drawing them back, all that is tending to give them rickets and consumption, and all the miserable diseases which children contract; see what men they are, and then conceive what they might be.

“It has been said, again, that there are no more beautiful races of women in Europe than the wives and daughters of our London shopkeepers, and yet there are few races of people who lead a life more in opposition to all rules of hygiene. But, in spite of all that, so wonderful is the vitality of the English race, they are what they are; and therefore we have the finest material

to work upon that people ever had. And therefore, again, we have the less excuse if we do allow English people to grow up puny, stunted, and diseased.

“ Let me refer again to that word that I used : death—the amount of death. I really believe there are hundreds of good and kind people who would take up this subject with their whole heart and soul if they were aware of the magnitude of the evil. Lord Shaftesbury told you just now that there were one hundred thousand preventable deaths in England every year. So it is. We talk of the loss of human life in war. We are the fools of smoke and noise ; because there are cannon balls and gunpowder and red coats, and because it costs a great deal of money and makes a great deal of noise in the papers, we think, What so terrible as war ! I will tell you what is ten times, and ten thousand times, more terrible than war, and that is—outraged nature. War, we are discovering now, is the clumsiest and most expensive of all games ; we are finding that if you wish to commit an act of cruelty or folly, the most expensive act that you can commit is to contrive to shoot your fellow-men in war. So it seems ; but Nature, insidious, inexpensive, silent, sends no roar of

cannon, no glitter of arms to do her work ; she gives no warning-note of preparation ; she has no protocol, nor any diplomatic advances, whereby she warns her enemy that war is coming. Silently, I say, and insidiously she goes forth ; no—she does not even go forth, she does not step out of her path, but quietly, by the very same laws by which she makes alive, she puts to death. By the very same laws by which every blade of grass grows, and every insect springs to life in the sunbeam, she kills and kills and kills, and is never tired of killing, till she has taught man the terrible lesson he is so slow to learn, that Nature is only conquered by obeying her.

“ And bear in mind one thing more. Man has his courtesies of war, and his chivalries of war : he does not strike the unarmed man ; he spares the woman and the child. But Nature is fierce when she is offended, as she is bounteous and kind when she is obeyed. She spares neither woman nor child. She has no pity : for some awful, but most good reason, she is not allowed to have any pity. Silently she strikes the sleeping child, with as little remorse as she would strike the strong man, with the musket or the pickaxe in his hand. Ah ! would to God that some man had the pictorial

eloquence to put before the mothers of England the mass of preventable suffering, the mass of preventable agony of mind and body, which exists in England year after year! And would that some man had the logical eloquence to make them understand that it is in their power, in the power of the mothers and wives of the higher class, I will not say to stop it all,—God only knows that,—but to stop, as I believe, three-fourths of it.

“ It is in the power, I believe, of any woman in this room to save three or four lives, human lives, during the next six months. It is in your power, ladies, and it is *so* easy. You might save several lives a-piece, if you choose, without, I believe, interfering with your daily business, or with your daily pleasure, or, if you choose, with your daily frivolities, in any way whatsoever. Let me ask, then, those who are here, and who have not yet laid these things to heart: Will you let this meeting to-day be a mere passing matter of two or three hours interest, which you shall go away and forget for the next book or the next amusement? Or will you be in earnest? Will you learn—I say it openly—from the noble chairman*, how easy it is to be in earnest in life; how every one of you,

* The Earl of Shaftesbury.

amid all the artificial complications of English society in the nineteenth century, can find a work to do, and a noble work to do, and a chivalrous work to do,—just as chivalrous as if you lived in any old fairy land, such as Spenser talked of in his ‘Faery Queen;’ how you can be as true a knight-errant, or lady-errant in the present century, as if you had lived far away in the dark ages of violence and rapine? Will you, I ask, learn this? Will you learn to be in earnest, and to use the position, and the station, and the talent that God has given you, to save alive those who should live? And will you remember that it is not the will of your Father that is in heaven that one little one that plays in the kennel outside should perish, either in body or in soul?”

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